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# Physionomies d'une cité grecque. Développements stylistiques de la coroplastie votive archaïque de Tarente

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# Physionomies d'une cité grecque. Développements stylistiques de la coroplathie votive archaïque de Tarente

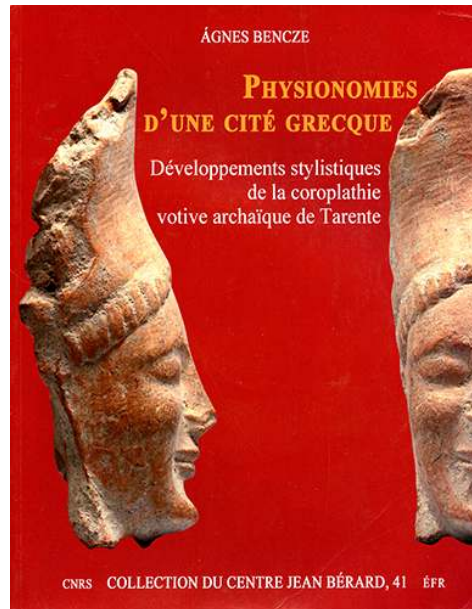
Michael Anthony Fowler

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## REFERENCES

Ágnes Bencze, *Physionomies d'une cité grecque. Développements stylistiques de la coroplathie votive archaïque de Tarente*, Collection du Centre Jean Bérard 41, Naples, Collection du Centre Jean Bérard, 2013, 240 pages. 36 pls (ISBN 978291887140).

- 1 In the introductory chapter (p. 11-25), Bencze discusses the various challenges of her project and how they shaped her chosen approach. The greatest portion of the material was excavated in the late nineteenth century in the context of the modern city's transformation into a major naval base for the recently unified Italian nation. A constellation of factors – unsystematic excavation methods, illicit digs, ineffective administration, and a burgeoning art market – contributed to the fragmentation and de-contextualization of artifactual assemblages and their dispersal to public and private collections around the world. In addition to being geographically disparate and devoid of contextual documentation, most collections of Tarentine figures remain partially or completely unpublished. Even the terracotta figures from the more recent scientific excavations at Saturo in the '60s and '70s still await publication.<sup>1</sup> These conditions placed very real practical constraints on research, leading scholars to concentrate on specific sets of objects from individual collections and with a primary interest in iconography rather than style. To overcome this situation, Bencze traveled to most of the major European collections of Tarentine terracottas in order to inspect the objects firsthand. As for reconstructing the archaeological contexts of the objects, the author relies on the topographic study completed two decades ago by Enzo Lippolis to associate most of the material with votive deposits in three different zones of the city (Pizzone, Fondo Giovinazzi, necropolis).<sup>2</sup>
- 2 Another challenge is interpretative and concerns the relationship between artistic style and identity. After briefly reviewing the problems inherent in various stylistic categories (ethnic, regional, local, personal), the author indicates her preference for Francis Croissant's view, according to which style is the product of a deliberate process of communal self-definition involving a selective synthesis ('bricolage') of existing formal languages.
- 3 The first chapter concludes with a discussion of the terms and conventions that the author will utilize in the study. A notable idiosyncrasy is the author's use of the term 'type' to refer to aspects that are usually denoted by 'series.' Types correspond to the individual prototypes from which all generations of molds and figures derive and are identified with distinct stylizations of the physiognomy of the head and face. Bencze's chooses to focus on this part of the figures, since it is not only the best preserved but also the least prone to modifications. For the purposes of the study, a 'series' constitutes a group of facial types with a shared stylistic affinity. Thus, the book's punning title.
- 4 Chapter 2 (p. 27-37) essentially takes the form of a critical reappraisal of Maurizio Borda's study of seventh-century Tarentine art,<sup>3</sup> with certain objects being excluded from the analysis for chronological reasons and others added (e.g. type Pr3 and variant



Pr3b). The resulting catalogue of types is extremely limited (12 total, of which only a third are attested by more than two pieces) and stylistically heterogeneous. The pieces can be divided into two different groups: lower quality, small format figures produced in multiples and more 'monumental' and higher-quality works produced uniquely. Given the heterogeneity of the pieces and their inaccessibility for inspection, the author prudently leaves open the possibility that some were imports. Among these twelve different types no continuous stylistic tradition could be identified. The author goes on to argue that these pieces were contemporaneous productions, contrary to Borda, who had ordered them chronologically according to perceived formal evolutions in their 'daedalic' style. What is more, apart from a few cases (Pr4, Pr5, Pr12) in which a Laconian connection is possible, the most pronounced stylistic analogies are to be sought in Cretan works. This presents another challenge to Borda's view, according to which the Laconian motherland exercised a direct and predominant artistic influence on the seventh-century creations. The latter observation leads the author to call attention to certain ancient historical accounts of Tarentum, which suggest that Cretans had already been present in the area before the arrival of the Spartans. The chapter demonstrates well the importance of according equal consideration to all possible avenues of stylistic influence.

- 5 The third chapter (p. 39-132) accounts for nearly half the monograph, as it concerns a formative, but hitherto unstudied, phase in the development of a quintessentially Tarentine composition. This phase, which is characterized by stylistic eclecticism, begins toward the end of the first quarter of the sixth century and reaches its height of stylistic diversity during the second and third quarter of the century. It is in this phase that Tarentine coroplastic 'industry' begins in earnest. While the previous 'daedalic' phase can also be described as eclectic, its constitutive types lacked the technical consistency, recognizable stylistic families, and mass production of those created in the second, sixth-century phase. Based on detailed comparative formal analyses, Bencze proposes the existence of six different, largely contemporaneous series, each of which adapts elements from different stylistic idioms: A (Achaean), B (Cypriot), C and D (Laconian), E (autochthonous), and F (Northern Ionian). Despite this diversity in style, the works are united by their method of production, including post-mold morphological additions, and their subjects, mostly of the S. Biago – Saturo class of 'déesse au kalathos.' Although not enough information is available to make a firm judgment on the origins of this iconographic class (Achaean?), in the context of Tarentine coroplastic production, it seems to appear first in type D1 (p. 97, 131-132), which could suggest that Laconian art also contributed to its formation. Therefore, unlike the previous phase, Laconian stylistic influence is early and pronounced. While it constitutes one among many artistic traditions with which Tarentine artisans experiment, it is notable that the first 'original' style of face (series E), which may have been incorporated into the first banqueter compositions (esp. no. 32: p. 118-120), finds its closest visual parallels in the Laconianizing series D.
- 6 While the author demonstrates well that these six stylistically distinct series nevertheless belong to a common artisanal tradition, her proposal that they all issued from a single workshop with a forty-year monopoly on production (p. 129, 132) is difficult to accept. The diversity of coexisting styles could have resulted from a single workshop testing out which styles fared best on the market; but the same phenomenon could also be explained by competition among rival workshops. And even if one were to attribute the creation of each of Bencze's types to one workshop, this situation would

not exclude the possibility that molds were shared or traded. It is also worth questioning whether a single workshop could have been responsible for producing the great quantity of figures thus far excavated, particularly since these pieces were only partially mold-made (cf. p. 40-41).<sup>4</sup> An analysis of the clay used in select specimens could have shed some light on the matter, as distinctions in fabrics may suggest the existence of multiple workshops using different raw materials and preparation methods.

- 7 Having already detected the possible emergence of Tarentine banqueters in the autochthonous series E (third quarter of the sixth century BCE), Bencze proceeds in Chapter 4 (p. 133-185) to a discussion of the four earliest identifiable series of facial types associated with banqueting compositions: G (Laconianizing), H (Milesian), J (Tarentine synthesis of Attic, Ionian, and Laconian elements), and K (another Tarentine innovation with stylistic affinity to the Zeus of Ugento). As in the previous chapter, the author's careful examination of the pieces leads to a number of important observations, some of which require revisions to existing scholarly opinion. To begin, banqueting compositions seem to have been created roughly two decades earlier than once thought (that is, ca. 530 BC). Because of this, they do not abruptly replace the "déesse au kalathos," but were rather produced alongside this form through the close of the sixth century, albeit with a different technique involving greater use of mold-made components. Within the period, the author notes an interesting phenomenon: in the fourth quarter of the sixth century, the production of the popular type G4 and series J is coincident with a decline in S. Biago – Saturo types. As in the previous phase of production, a Laconianizing type (G1) seems to be earliest in date. This fact relates well with the author's persuasive argument that the posture of the reclining banqueter derives from cognate scenes in Laconian vase painting and not East Greek sculpture, as had long been maintained (p. 148, 184).
- 8 In a brief final chapter (p. 187-192), Bencze brings the results of her stylistic analyses to bear on the longstanding scholarly discussion on the identity and religious significance of the Tarentine banqueting compositions. First, the diversity in facial types, iconographic elements, and added ornaments (as well as the combination of banqueters with different attributes into a single piece: Taranto 50436; pl. XXVII) encountered in the earliest series seem to indicate that no particular subject was being depicted (p. 189-190). Second, the author returns to the Laconian graphic origins of the banqueting composition and suggests these works may have inspired not just the formal elements of the Tarentine banqueters, but also their meaning. In view of the marked presence of these objects in the depots at the cult site of Fondo Giovinazzi as well as in the necropolis, and following Reinhard Förtsch's interpretation of Laconian banqueting scenes,<sup>5</sup> she hypothesizes that the Tarentine banqueters represented heroized deceased citizens (p. 190-191). While such a reading is plausible, the iconographic variations in the figures of the earliest series may suggest that the basic form of reclining banqueter was being used to represent more than one thing, including specific personages (e.g. local heroes). Of a more speculative nature is the author's revival of the view that the banqueting figures functioned within the context of a Dionysian cult of Orpheus, which she believes finds further corroboration through a comparison to the Laconian hero reliefs (like that of Chrysapha). It would be useful to know the identity of the deity/deities worshipped and the rituals practiced in the sanctuary at Fondo Giovinazzi, but these remain matters of debate.

- 9 The text is, for the most part, well edited. The reviewer highlights only those errors that interfere with ease of use: On p. 43 n. 15 the image reference should pl. VII, b (not fig. 7a); in the discussion on p. 76-77 ex. 12 is referred to as 11; the catalogue number reported in ex. no. 21 (p. 101) does not match that in the photographic registry (p. 199); the images referenced for ex. 22 and 23 of type D4 (p. 105 with pl. XVII) should be flipped; the same problem applies to ex. 38 and 39 on p. 127, with pl. XXI; on pl. XXII, ex. no. 43 should be labeled type G2, not G3; in the discussion of Type G3 on p. 144, the comparison to the possibly seated female figure of type G4 is ex. no. 45, not 46; the comparison of type H4 to the face of the Louvre Dionysos (p. 157) should be pl. XXVI, not XXI; on plate XXXI, the figures corresponding to ex. 66 and 68 are labeled with the incorrect type (they should both be J1/b). The figures are printed in black and white and are of varying, generally serviceable, quality.
- 10 In general, the author succeeds in producing a sensitive portrait of coroplastic production in Archaic Tarentum, underscoring in the process the historical relevance of style. In so doing, the author exposes the inadequacy of the assumption that 'minor' works of art produced for votive use were simply created in imitation of more monumental creations. Without denying the influence of 'major' works, Bencze's exploration of Tarentine terracottas nevertheless tells of an enterprising cadre of artisans whose diverse stylistic experiments played an integral role in the development and articulation of a communal style. Such provides a bottom-up alternative to artistic influence: the coroplastic workshop as a testing ground for which tastes appeal to the public (p. 16-17). In fact, a focus on the coroplastic productions of a given community may help identify the origin of archaeologically unprovenanced works, e.g. the hydria of Grächwil (p. 25, 100-101, 132) and the Zeus of Ugento (p. 177-183), which the author proposes were Tarentine creations. For all these reasons, it is hoped that Bencze's study encourages similar research projects to be carried out for other artistic centers.

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## NOTES

1. That said, archaeological investigation of the cult sites at Saturo has recently been reprised: see, e.g., E. Lippolis, C.M. Marchetti, V. Parisi, "Saturo (TA). Campagna di scavo 2007-2013," *Scienze dell'antichità* 20 (2014), p. 73-104.
2. E. Lippolis, "La documentazione archeologica," in *Id.*, S. Garraffo, M. Nafissi (eds.), *Culti greci in Occidenti, 1: Taranto*, Taranto, 1995, p. 29-129.
3. Cf. M. Borda, *Arte dedalica a Taranto*, Pordenone, 1979. This volume served as an indispensable reference for the author, as she was unable to access many of the objects treated therein (esp. those housed at the Museo Civico de Trieste).
4. A. Muller, *Les terres cuites votives du Thesmophorion: de l'atelier au sanctuaire. Études thasiennes* 17, Athens, 1996, p. 41, estimated that with the use of a bivalve mold an individual could produce around 30 terracotta figures per diem. The archaic Tarentine pieces were composed not just of mold-made components (single-sided) but also of wheel-made and/or hand-made ones, which would have slowed production time and required the involvement of a skilled worker. In fact, Bencze acknowledges (p. 41) that the method of production used for the S. Biago – Saturo class of figures would have been "assez lent." On the subject of the coroplastic workshop, see the recent synthesis of scholarship on Greek coroplastic workshops, A. Muller, "L'atelier du coroplate: un cas particulier dans la production céramique grecque," *Perspective* 2014.1, p. 63-82, in which the author challenges the notions of the coroplast as an "artist-artisan modeler who dominated the entire chain of production of figurines" and of the workshop as "the single place of creation and fabrication of figurines" (p. 79, 80, trans. mine).

5. R. Förtsch, *Kunstverwendung und Kunstlegitimation im archaischen und frühklassischen Sparta*, Mainz, 2001, p. 142-145.

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## ABSTRACTS

The present monograph is a revised and expanded version of Ágnes Bencze's dissertation, defended at the University of Paris I in December 2005. The study, the result of over a decade of research, including autopsy of relevant materials held in several museum storerooms throughout Europe, offers the first systematic stylistic classification of all extant types of mold-made votive terracottas produced in archaic Tarentum. Through the adoption of a broad chronological frame and an exhaustive approach to the corpus of evidence, the author aims to trace the stylistic development of local coroplastic production from its origins in the latter half of the seventh century to the emergence of the distinctly Tarentine form of reclining banqueter in the final decades of the sixth-century. In so doing, the author treats the diverse stylistic influences to which local artisans seem to have been exposed, whether directly or indirectly, and the (art) historical implications of their reception.

## INDEX

**Keywords:** Agnes Bencze, Tarantine terracottas, Tarantine banqueters, Saturno, Pizzone, Fondo Giovinazzi

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